The Attorney General

May 28, 1968

Director, FBI

1 - Mr. DeLoach
1 - Mr. Gale
1 - Mr. Sullivan
1 - Mr. Staffeld

DREW PEARSON-JACK ANDERSON COLUMN
REGARDING MARTIN LUTHER KING,
WASHINGTON POST EDITION OF MAY 24, 1968

With reference to your memorandum of May 27, 1968, I share your concern regarding the Drew Pearson - Jack Anderson column in the "Washington Post" of May 24, 1968. As a matter of fact, immediately upon the appearance of this article I had a thorough analysis made of the alleged facts contained therein and, while a number of them are false or have previously appeared in publications, I nevertheless had a careful check made of all IDI employees who normally handle contacts with newspapers to determine if they had either released the alleged facts in question, or had discussed such matters with Pearson and Anderson. I have been assured that such is not the case. Therefore, in connection with your observation that only a very few people in your office and among representatives of my office would have access to such information and that this disclosure evidences a lack of integrity in our system, you may be assured that no such integrity has existed among representatives of my office.

The fact that there was a wiretap on Dr. Martin Luther King has been alluded to previously in newspaper articles and columns. As a matter of fact, Richard Harwood, writing in the "Washington Post" on February 23, 1968, made reference to such coverage. Allegations in his article and in various other articles were obviously repeated by Pearson and Anderson in their column of May 24, 1968.

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The reference to the date July 20, 1965, as mentioned by Pearson and Anderson as the date [illegible] Attorney General Kennedy first ordered an electronic surveillance placed on Dr. Martin Luther King, was likewise made to many sources.

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NOTE: See DeLoach to Tolson memorandum, 5/28/68, same caption, CDD:JEG:TJE/csh

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The Attorney General

Former FBI employee Courtney Evans, who is now a temporary employee of the Department of Justice (and whose credibility is subject to serious question as a result of a number of falsifications and distortions of fact he has made publicly regarding FBI practices), was very much aware of this particular date as well as virtually all information contained in the Pearson column. As you may recall, two FBI representatives questioned Mr. Evans quite thoroughly on December 24, 1965, and on June 2, 1966, and reviewed with him numerous memoranda which he prepared in making a record of his pertinent conversations with former Attorney General Kennedy regarding electronic surveillance coverage by the FBI.

The Attorney General's Office, of course, was aware of this date as a result of discussions between Evans and former Attorney General Kennedy regarding the coverage of King in question. Such individuals as former Executive Assistant to the Attorney General Harold Reis would have been aware of these discussions as would former Assistant Attorney General Burke Marshall in connection with Mr. Kennedy's interest in having the FBI institute electronic surveillance coverage on Dr. King. In addition, the Solicitor General has been briefed concerning the FBI's electronic surveillance on Dr. King.

In connection with the desirability of a plea of immunity in the civil suit in Las Vegas against FBI personnel, three FBI representatives on October 16, 1967, briefed two representatives of the Department of Justice relative to former Attorney General Kennedy's authorization of microphones and wiretaps. The date July 16, 1963, was mentioned during this briefing in connection with a discussion of our electronic surveillance coverage of Dr. King. As you are perhaps aware, Mr. Kennedy first requested that a wiretap be placed on Dr. King on July 16, 1963. The FBI's memorandum regarding authority to make this installation was personally approved by Mr. Kennedy as of October 10, 1963. The wiretap, however, was not activated on Dr. King until November 8, 1963.

For your information, I did not bring up any reference to wiretap or microphone coverage during my meeting with Dr. King on December 1, 1964, as alluded to in Mr. Pearson's column. I am not aware of any statement made by Dr. King after this conference which was "surprisingly favorable" to the FBI.

The Attorney General

Reports of Mr. King and his activities, involving [redacted] and including infiltration and domination by communists, were disseminated to authorized sources on a number of occasions. In handling our heavy responsibilities in the field of internal security, it would be unthinkable not to disseminate such information. Your office, the White House, the Vice President's office, the military intelligence agencies, and the Central Intelligence Agency, have been the recipients of these classified reports. As you can well appreciate, where it is necessary to disseminate to other agencies in the government, the risk of leaks is ever present.

I am always dismayed when information of the above nature is given to unauthorized sources. I have also been greatly concerned, as you know, over the extreme harm which has been caused as a result of the disclosure of microphone coverage in numerous organized crime cases which, upon general and/or specific authorization of the Attorney General (and later installation by this Bureau), were fully exposed, as well as the legal pertaining thereto, in Federal court. This has occurred now in at least 27 instances. My objections to such procedures have been made known to you, both orally by my representatives, and in writing.

Considering the unfortunate criticism that has been levelled at the FBI over the years by Drew Pearson and others, it is inconceivable that any FBI employee having access to such data would volunteer information of this nature to these columnists. I cannot provide this same guarantee with regard to a number of former employees.

This Bureau will, of course, be glad to initiate an investigation of the circumstances surrounding the Pearson - Anderson column in question, if you so desire. You may be assured once again, however, that such information did not originate from representatives of this Bureau. I also wish to call to your attention that any investigation of this type would naturally entail interviews with all possible sources referred to in this letter, including representatives of your office, the office of the Solicitor General, the White House, military intelligence agencies, and various other Departments and agencies.